

Questions and Answers from the Urban Self-Help/Self-Help Workshop May 30, 2007

Please note that communities must submit an FY08 Commonwealth Capital application in order to receive a score. [Click here for more information on Commonwealth Capital.](#)

Question: If land has been purchased for general municipal purposes, is a vote needed to dedicate it to park and recreation purposes?

Answer: Yes. A vote is necessary, but can occur after the grant application has been submitted. DCS requires the vote by the end of the calendar year.

Question: Is an appraisal required for a non-acquisition project?

Answer: No.

Question: Can land dedicated for park purposes be leased to a school?

Answer: No.

Question: Can city staff do the design work?

Answer: Yes, but you cannot be reimbursed for their salary. Design should be done by those with experience in designing public parks.

Question: Can Urban Self-Help or Self-Help be coupled with a private grant?

Answer: Yes, but the private grant must be donated to the municipality and placed in a dedicated account for that project. This is because Urban Self-Help reimbursements can only be made on a city check.

Question: How much lead time should the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program and the Massachusetts Historical Commission be given for their comment letters?

Answer: Both programs should respond within a month or so of the receipt of a community's letter. It is not necessary, however, to have their response letter in your application. Just be sure to include the cover letter sent to NHESP and MHC in the application.

Question: Can the Commonwealth Capital application be submitted later than the application date? Have there been problems in the past with getting scores in a timely manner?

Answer: Commonwealth Capital applications should be submitted at the same time as the Urban Self-Help or Self-Help application, but the drop dead deadline for submission is August 31, 2007. The applicant should not be concerned with when the scoring is completed as long as they submit the application in time.

Question: What is passive recreation?

Answer: Passive recreation is not a sweat equity issue. The rule of thumb is usually if you have to paint a line, you have crossed the line into active recreation.

Question: Are motorized vehicles allowed on Self-Help sites?

Answers: That is a local use decision, except for motorized wheelchairs, which must be allowed.

Question: Are dog parks eligible?

Answer: Urban Self-Help has previously funded parks with dog park features. Dog parks are typically on recreation land. General dog use is a local use decision.

Question: Are bike paths eligible?

Answer: Bike paths are permissible on both Self-Help and Urban Self-Help land. However, only Urban Self-Help can pay for constructing a bike path.

Question: Can parking lots be built on Self-Help land?

Answer: Yes. Picnic structures, comfort stations, and kiosks can also be built.

Question: Define accessibility for conservation areas.

Answer: Paved paths are not necessary, but firm and level paths are. Sites may not lend themselves to be fully accessible, but think of expanding accessibility beyond mobility accessibility. Visit http://www.mass.gov/dcr/universal_access/index.htm for the latest is accessible outdoor recreation areas for ideas, from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Question: Can other funds besides municipal funds be used for the municipality's portion of the grant cost?

Answer: We can only reimburse on a city or town check. If other funding is coming from a private donation, the money should be deposited into an earmarked account for the project so that we may reimburse the community for the money expended.

Question: Does the municipality have to wait until the end of the project to be reimbursed?

Answer: For acquisition projects, yes, but construction projects will typically have three to four reimbursements throughout the two-year project.

Question: A municipality is considering an acquisition that includes some Zone 1 land, but does not include the well site. Can Self-Help money be used for this site?

Answer: Most likely, the Zone 1 land would have to be excluded. DEP expects that Zone 1 land be under the care and control of the local board of water commissioners. Self-Help requires that the conservation commission own the land. This would obviously cause a conflict. The Zone 1 land would not be eligible for Self-Help funding, so this portion of the land should be excluded from the appraisal and project application.

Question: There is an existing agricultural field on our Self-Help application site. How could we use this fact to maximize our points on our application?

Answer: Agriculture is one of the multiple use points on the application's rating system. Self-Help's priority is habitat protection and public access is required. The agricultural use would have to comply with these facts.

Question: How much Land and Water Conservation Fund money is available?

Answer: About \$600,000.

Question: How much money is available for Self-Help and Urban Self-Help?

Answer: We are not sure yet. But bond accounts are running low.

Question: Please confirm – both Urban Self-Help and Self-Help require an FY08 Commonwealth Capital Score.

Answer: Yes. The FY08 Commonwealth Capital Application should be filled out by August 31, 2007.

Question: At what point does a change of use at a municipal conservation or park site become an Article 97 issue and make a community ineligible for funding?

Answer: This is a case by case question and is usually determined by how far the municipality is in the formal Article 97 conversion process. Generally, when the votes have been taken to authorize a conversion at the municipal level, the community has begun the conversion process and is likely to be ineligible for funding.

Question: Can Urban Self-Help money be used to pay for the fill necessary to cap a brownfield site?

Answer: Perhaps. This will depend on the particular project and its design.

Question: Can Urban Self-Help money be used to build trails connecting parks?

Answer: Yes it can, but it may not rate as highly as another park project in your municipality. Be sure that the land for the trail is owned by the municipality and under the Parks Department. Check the rating system in the application package.

Question: We have received Urban Self-Help funding in the past. Can we apply for a grant to build a parking lot at this site?

Answer: This is an eligible project, but it may not rate highly.

Question: Can the cost of donated land or back taxes be counted as “match”?

Answer: It is important to keep in mind that match is not an appropriate term to use with Self-Help and Urban Self-Help grants. The municipality must pay for 100% of the project up front, DCS then reimburses a particular percentage of the total project cost. All money must be spent during the contract period should the community want to be reimbursed for the work done. Due to this, the cost of donated land and back taxes do not count as a part of the total project cost. Municipal expenses are the only thing that a municipality can be reimbursed for. The Self-Help tax title project in Springfield is an interesting case where the grant was used to pay for the legal service to redeem the tax title property.

Question: Does in-kind contributions of staff time (force account labor) count as a reimbursable expense?

Answer: No.

Question: Can a community submit more than one application?

Answer: Yes, a community can submit more than one application. This is not discouraged as we are looking for the best possible projects.

Question: How many applications were submitted last year and how many grants were awarded?

Answer: Urban Self-Help had 36 applications and awarded 21 grants. Self-Help had 19 applications and awarded 13 grants.

Question: What if my community does not have a parks department?

Answer: In most communities without a parks department, another entity has been given care and control of the parks. This could be the Board of Selectmen or the Department of Public Works, for instance. Find the town or city bylaw that specifies who is to have care and control of the parks and submit that with your application.

Question: When does the project sign need to go up?

Answer: Before the community receives their final reimbursement.

Question: Are quarterly reports required?

Answer: For Urban Self-Help projects, yes.

Question: Is there a way for a small town project to receive more than \$50,000?

Answer: If the project is regional or statewide (has 100-300 car parking or is close to public transportation – fill out the usage report included in the application), it can qualify for up to \$500,000.

Question: Are costs associated with land acquisition eligible for reimbursement?

Answer: No, the only eligible cost for land acquisition projects is the cost of the property based on the appraised value, or negotiated purchase, whichever is less. Other associated costs such as appraisal reports, legal documents, etc are not reimbursable.

Question: Are survey costs for Urban Self-Help eligible for reimbursement?

Answer: These costs can be included if they are from an outside surveyor and part of the park design and design contract period.

Question: Will you do a site visit prior to the application period?

Answer: Yes, we would be happy to do so. Please call or email us to set up a meeting.

Question: Do you encourage letters of support from state representatives and senators or mayors?

Answer: These letters do not affect the rating of a project, although it is always good to let these folks know what is going on in your parks and conservation departments.

Question: If we submitted a draft Open Space and Recreation Plan last year, does that mean we have to submit an updated draft this year?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Is the SCORP on the website?

Answer: Yes. You can find it at

<http://www.mass.gov/envir/dcs/global/publications.htm>.